

## Message Text

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22

ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03

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R 261055Z FEB 76

FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4261

C O N F I D E N T I A L NEW DELHI 2894

FOLLOWING REPEAT BOMBAY 478 SENT ACTION NEW DELHI

INFO CALCUTTA/MADRAS 26 FEB 76

QUOTE:

BOMBAY 0478

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT IN

SUBJECT: GUJARAT

REF: BOMBAY 424

1. THE SITUATION IN GUJARAT CONTINUES FRAGILE, THOUGH MOST OF THOSE WITH WHOM WE HAVE TALKED IN RECENT DAYS BELIEVE THAT THE JANATA FRONT GOVERNMENT MAY LAST THROUGH THE BUDGET SESSION. THE FRONT'S TROUBLES ARE NOT OVER, HOWEVER, AND THE ADHERENCE OF JAY-DEEPSINGH BARIA, ONE OF THE FOUNDERS OF THE KMLP AND A SENIOR STATE LEGISLATOR AND FORMER STATE MINISTER, TO CONG (R) ON FEB 24 COULD UPSET THE DELICATE BALANCE IN THE STATE, SINCE THE DEFECT-ION OF A MAN OF HIS STATURE COULD MAKE DEFECTION MORE RESPECTABLE AND MIGHT ENCOURAGE FENCE SITTERS TO FOLLOW HIM. (WE ALREADY HEAR THAT HE IS TRYING TO CONVINCE THREE OTHER FORMER KMLP MLAS TO OPENLY JOIN THE CONTRESS.)

2. THE JANATA FRONT SUFFERED A SETBACK IN THE AHMEDABAD SCHOOL  
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BOARD ELECTIONS OF FEB 20 WHEN FIVE JF MUNICIPAL CORPORATORS

VOTED FOR THE CONG (R) CANDIDATES ENABLING THE CONG (R) TO TAKE SIX OF THE TWELVE SEATS. THE CONGRESS IS NOW HOPEFUL OF WINNING THE BOARD CHAIRMANSHIP ON MARCH 5, AS RUMORS THAT THE TWO KMLP CORPORATORS WHOSE SUPPORT HAS ENABLED THE JF TO RETAIN POWER IN THE AHMEDABAD MUNICIPAL CORPORATION, ARE SAID TO BE READY TO JOIN THE CONG (R). APPARENTLY CONG (R) IS HAVING MORE SUCCESS PICKING UP SUPPORT AT THE MUNICIPAL ELECTION THAN IT HAS HAD AT THE STATE LEVEL.

3. CHIMANBHAI PATEL CONTINUES ACTIVE AND REPORTEDLY IS COOPERATING WITH HITENDRA DESAI ON STRATEGY TO BE PURSUED IN THE NEXT FEW WEEKS. WE HAVE HEARD BUT HAVE NOT CONFIRMED THAT CHIMANBHAI MET MRS GANDHI IN BOMBAY ON FEB 22, WHICH WOULD LEND CREDENCE TO THE REPORT THAT MRS GANDHI HAS IN FACT BEEN DEPENDING ON CHIMANBHAI TO PLAY A KEY ROLE IN TOPPLING THE FRONT. HAD CHIMANBHAI BEEN ABLE TO DELIVER THE ENTIRE KMLP DELEGATION THE FRONT WOULD ALREADY HAVE COME DOWN, AND ONLY THE UNWILLINGNESS OF VALLABHAI PATEL TO DESERT THE FRONT HAS SAVED IT THUS FAR. BRITISH DEPUTY HIGH COMMISSIONER WILLIAM PETERS TELLS US HE PERSONALLY HAS CONCLUDED THAT CHIMANBHAI HAS BEEN PLAYING MRS GANDHI'S GAME ALL ALONG, AND ACTUALLY FORMED THE KMLP WITH THE IDEA OF DELIVERING IT TO THE CONG (R) IF AND WHEN ITS SUPPORT MIGHT BE NEEDED.

4. WE HAVE ALSO NOTED IN THE LAST FEW DAYS GROWING TALK OF A MERGER BETWEEN THE TWO CONGRESSES IN GUJARAT, THOUGH WHETHER THE CONG (O) LEADERS WOULD AGREE TO A MERGER WITHOUT MORARJI DESAI'S CONCURRENCE SEEMS OPEN TO QUESTION. STILL, TALKS CONCERNING MERGER PERSISTS, WITH MANY GUJARATIS TELLING US THE CONG (O) TYPES WOULD PREFER MERGER TO CONTINUED COOPERATION WITH THE JANA SANGH. THERE IS SOME OPINION THAT MRS GANDHI MIGHT IMPOSE PRESIDENT'S RULE ON THE BASIS OF THE POLITICAL INSTABILITY IN THE STATE, SINCE THE FRONT'S THIN MAJORITY FORCES IT TO SPEND MUCH OF ITS TIME FIGHTING FOR ITS LIFE AND LEAVES LITTLE TIME FOR THE BUSINESS OF GOVT. AFTER THE IMPOSITION OF PRESIDENT'S RULE, THE PRIME MINISTER WOULD REPORTEDLY CONCENTRATE ON A MERGER IN THE STATE. WITH A MERGER, CONG (R) COULD THEN FORM A GOVERNMENT QUITE COMFORTABLY.

5. THIS IS ALL VERY MUCH A GUESSING GAME, OBVIOUSLY, WITH THE TYPE OF OPINION DEPENDING ON WHOM ONE IS TALKING TO. THE ONLY

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THING EVERYBODY AGREES ON IS THAT THE FRONT REALLY CANNOT LAST VERY MUCH LONGER, AND THE BIG QUESTIONS ARE (A) WHEN IT WILL GO, (B) HOW IT WILL GO, AND (C) WHAT WILL SUCCEED IT.

6. SOME LOCAL OBSERVERS SAY THAT MRS GANDHI WAS PREOCCUPIED WITH TAMIL NADU UNTIL JAN 31. WITH THE SITUATION IN THAT STATE NOW "SETTLED", THESE OBSERVERS SAY SHE CAN CONCENTRATE ON GUJARAT. HER REFERENCE TO GUJARAT IN HER SPEECH AT SHIVAJI PARK BOMBAY ON

ON FEB 22, WHILE MADE IN AN HISTORICAL CONTEXT AS ONE OF THE  
JUSTIFICATIONS FOR THE IMPOSITION OF THE EMERGENCY,IPS CITED AS  
PROOF THAT GUJARAT IS VERY MUCH ON HER MIND.  
COURTNEY

UNQUOTE.  
SAXBE

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